



NEWS RELEASE

Advocates Laud Agreement by Governor Hochul and Legislative Leaders To Create a 9-8-8 Crisis Response System While Stressing the Need for Funding

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A broad cross-section of more than a hundred mental health, substance-use, health, criminal justice and children's advocates along with healthcare providers, legal rights advocates and faith leaders thanked and congratulated Governor Hochul for signing legislation in law today that authorizes the creation of a 9-8-8 call-system to replace 9-1-1 as the appropriate number to use for someone in a mental health crisis. They also expressed great thanks for the work of legislative leaders in crafting and negotiating the legislation.

"We are extremely grateful to Governor Hochul and the Legislature for taking this crucial step together towards authorizing the 9-8-8 system and providing New York with this historic opportunity to create a mental health response to a mental health crisis," said Matthew Shapiro, Director of Public Affairs for NAMI-NYS.

Today's agreement is the first step towards a fully developed implementation system and the identification of adequate funding to launch the landmark program. It provides for a report that will be presented to the Legislature outlining a plan for implementation, including recommendations for strategies for identifying and supporting funding streams to meet projected calls and training and cultural competence standards.

While advocates celebrated that New York has advanced the 9-8-8 initiative, they urged Governor Hochul and legislative leaders to include a number of provisions in a final agreement that they believe are essential to the program's success.

They emphasized that the 9-8-8 program must be appropriately and sustainably funded in order to provide 24-hour statewide coverage, seven days a week with all the services offered in-state with the ability to provide local resources and done in a linguistically and culturally competent manner. There must also be funding to accommodate an appropriate workforce to create the necessary capacity to meet this need.

Additionally, funding must be available to educate the public on the difference between 9-8-8 and 9-1-1, finally, advocates want to ensure the New York State Office of Mental Health oversees 9-8-8's operations.

"We can only achieve the promise of this landmark step forward if sufficient funding is included in the upcoming 2022-23 budget," said Glenn Liebman, CEO of the Mental Health Association in NYS

The advocates emphasized the impact the new 9-8-8 system will have on redirecting New Yorkers in distress from the criminal justice system and towards a life in recovery in the community.

“The criminalization of mental illness is one of the leading social justice issues of our time. New York’s jails and prisons are disproportionately populated by people living with a mental illness who deserve an approach focused on treatment and recovery, not punishment,” said Wendy Burch, executive director of the National Alliance on Mental Illness-NYS.

The groups emphasized the impact of the program in promoting racial equality and justice.

“It is estimated that more than 60% of New York’s incarcerated population have a diagnosable mental health and/or addiction related condition,” said Harvey Rosenthal, CEO of the New York Association of Psychiatric Rehabilitation Services. “This is especially true in communities of color, which are far less likely to have access to mental health care and far more likely to have a negative interaction with law enforcement.”

The advocates highlighted the work of key legislative leaders in crafting and reaching today’s agreement.

“Great thanks are due to work of our legislative mental health committee chairs Senator Samra Brouk and Assembly Member Aileen Gunther in helping to shape the bill and for their efforts to work with the Hochul administration to see that appropriate funding is included in the 2022-23 state budget,” said Rosenthal.